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ABSTRACT

Issues in the development and evaluation of cross-cultural training in a business setting were investigated. Cross-cultural training and cross-cultural evaluation were defined as training and evaluation of training that involve the interaction of participants from two or more different countries. Two evaluations of a management development-type course on conducting successful small group meetings were conducted. The first course evaluation involved 15 participants from the United States. The evaluation methods included observation, interviews with course participants, questionnaires completed by participants, and a group debriefing. The second evaluation involved 12 participants from several European locations who took the revised version of the same course. Both evaluations resulted in relatively high ratings of the overall effectiveness of the course from the participants. Strengths of the training identified by U.S. participants included relevancy to job responsibilities, use of role plays to practice skills, use of videotapes, and instructors. Strengths identified by international participants were relevancy to job responsibilities; opportunity to practice skills in role plays, simulations, and practice teaching; and instructors. Four areas that needed to be considered to ensure appropriateness of training for international audiences were (1) reviewing course content to make sure terminology, acronyms, and words are defined clearly; (2) slowing down, subtitling, or dubbing videotapes; (3) reviewing time estimates; and (4) allowing participants to do role plays in their native languages. (YLB)

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Issues in the Development and Evaluation of Cross-cultural Training in a Business Setting

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to present the results of an investigation of issues in the development and evaluation of cross-cultural training in a business setting. The results of two evaluations are presented and discussed. The first evaluation was based on a course conduct given to an audience where all participants were from the United States. The second evaluation involved a conduct of the same course given to an international audience. There were several areas where some differences emerged due to the differing nature of the audiences. A general discussion of issues to consider in presenting, developing, and evaluating cross-cultural training is then presented. The information presented should be of value to those who may be involved in developing training offered to international audiences as well as to those who may be involved in evaluating such training.

Author Note

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Issues in the Development and Evaluation of Cross-cultural Training in a Business Setting

As businesses and industries become international in scope, the training that is conducted within those companies must also reflect the international nature of the trainee audiences. As Adler and Kiggundu (1982) stated:

> "In industry, government and other sectors of the economy, there seems to be a constant striving for improvement, competitive advantage and excellence through employee training. Today this emphasis on training is rapidly spreading throughout the world. Professional trainers are increasingly working with people whose cultural and linguistic background is other than their own."

Several articles have addressed the need for businesspeople to attend to cultural differences when conducting business outside of the United States and for trainers to prepare these businesspeople to deal with cultural differences (e.g., Burns, 1984; Copeland, 1984, 1985; Glenn, Witmeyer & Stevenson, 1977; Graham & Herberger, 1983; Porter & Samovar, 1976; Roberts, 1984; Saner-Yui & Saner-Yui, 1984; Steeves, 1984; Ward, 1984). Many of the cultural issues these authors describe apply to training that is presented to people from countries outside the United States.

Swing (1984) discussed three main issues to consider when human resource development (HRD) professionals deliver training outside of the United States: the personal characteristics of the HRD professionals, the necessity for particularly careful assessment and preparation prior to instruction, the need for materials and methodologies appropriate to the cultures in which HRD takes place.

Hites & Fisher (1984) stated that the following three points should be kept in mind when course materials that are designed for a particular audience are adapted for use by another audience that includes international trainees: (1) international trainees are often taught in their second (weaker) language; (2) they are often taught by an instructor from another culture; and (3) they arrive with different basic skills and knowledge. They propose that the adaptation of course materials for international students can be broken down to three basic steps: (1) conducting an audience and needs analysis; (2) matching audience need to existing course objectives; and (3) adapting the materials (Hites & Fisher, 1984, p. 7).

Between April 1983 and February 1984, Merryfield (1985) conducted interviews with twenty-six people who had some experience with cross-cultural evaluations. The interviewees were asked about their perceptions of what cross-cultural evaluation was, evaluation problems unique to cross-cultural settings, and methods or strategies they had found to be most useful in overçoming those problems. Merryfield's findings showed that respondents felt there were some unique problems with cross-cultural evaluations. These problems fell into three categories: problems stemming from cultural differences, problems related to the application of Western evaluation methods in non-Western contexts, and problems of ethics in cross-cultural evaluation. Merryfield concluded that "an understanding of cultural norms and values increases an evaluator's ability to provide reliable and useful information."

Given the increased emphasis in business settings on cross-cultural training, there should be a corresponding emphasis on considerations in developing and evaluating cross-cultural training programs. For the purposes of this paper, cross-cultural training and cross-cultural evaluation is defined as training and the evaluation of training which involves the interaction of participants from two or more different countries.

The objective of this paper is to present the results of an investigation of issues in the development and evaluation of cross-cultural training in a business setting. The paper begins with a discussion of the results of two evaluations of a management development-type course on conducting successful meetings. One of the evaluations was based on a course conduct given in the United States to an audience where all participants were from the United States. The other was based on a course conduct given in Switzerland to an audience of participants who were all from outside the United States. After discussing the results of these two evaluations, a general discussion of issues to consider in developing cross-cultural training is presented. The information presented here should be of value to those who may be involved in developing training offered to international audiences as well as to those who may be involved in evaluating such training.

Method

Two course evaluations were conducted. The purpose of both evaluations was to provide course developers with feedback to enable them to make immediate revisions to instructional materials as well as to instructional methods prior to releasing the training. The impact of the training on job performance was not examined as part of this study.

The first course evaluation involved fifteen participants from the United States who were taking the initial offering of a management development-type course on how to conduct successful small group meetings. The evaluation methods used included observation, interviews with course participants, questionnaires completed by participants, and a group debriefing. Based on the evaluation results, the content underwent minor revisions.

The second evaluation discussed involved twelve participants from several European locations who took the revised version of the same course. All but one of the participants were non-native English speakers. One of the instructors was from the United States. The other was a multilingual, European instructor. The course developers were particularly interested in how applicable the instructional materials and methods used in this course would be for an international audience. The information obtained in the evaluation would be used by course developers in making any revisions to the course deemed necessary before delivering it to international audiences. The evaluation methods used included observation, interviews with course participants, and questionnaires completed by participants. The questionnaires used for this evaluation contained more detailed questions on the three videotapes used in the course than did the first evaluation. In addition to asking about the effectiveness of each videotape and about its overall quality, there were questions on the effectiveness of the examples and situations depicted in the videotapes, the appropriateness of the pace, and the extent to which the participants understood the English in the videotape.

Results

Both evaluations resulted in relatively high ratings of the overall effectiveness of the course from the participants. The overall rating for the course when offered to the participants from the United States was 4.9 and the overall rating for the course when offered to international participants was 4.5 (both ratings are on a five-point scale where 5=excellent, 4=good, 3=fair, 2=marginal, 1=poor).

For the evaluation of the course offered to participants from the United States, the following were identified as strengths of the training: relevancy to participants' job responsibilities, the use of role plays to provide realistic practice of presentations skills, the use of videotapes to demonstrate skills and concepts covered in the lecture, and the instructors. The results of this evaluation concluded that the course would most likely be successful if it were released "as is" but that there were a few aspects of the course which could be improved. Recommendations for revising the training included: reducing the number of issues covered in one of the case studies, allowing more time for participants to prepare for a practice teaching exercise, deleting a small activity that was not considered by participants to reinforce concepts in the lecture, and reducing the amount of information for one of the role plays. Some minor changes were made in the content based on these evaluation results.

For the evaluation of the course with international participants, the following were identified as strengths of the training: relevancy to participants' job responsibilities; the opportunity to practice skills in role plays, simulations, and practice teaching; and the instructors. Although the

course overall was well received, there were a few points identified for the course developers to consider when offering the course to an international audience. These included: reviewing the time estimates; reviewing the course content to be sure that terminology, acronyms, and words are defined clearly; and allowing participants to do the role plays in their native languages. One of the evaluation conclusions was that the actual time needed for various sections of the course may fluctuate from the agenda estimates depending on the level of experience of the participants and also on their degree of comfort with speaking and reading English. In regards to terminology, there were several instances of questions arising regarding particular words or phrases that participants did not understand. Participants also expressed confusion when jargon and acronyms were used. In regards to the role plays, some participants indicated they found they had to concentrate on what to say in English during the role plays which made it more difficult to actually do the role play and think about applying the techniques they were learning. Some participants suggested that if there were enough participants with the same language background, it would be easier and take less time to prepare for an do role plays if they could do them in their native language.

Discussion

The results of both evaluations indicated that this course was well received by participants and relevant to their job responsibilities. There were four areas where there were some differences between the audience of participants from the United States and the international participants. These are discussed below:

> Terminology/acronyms. While it did not appear to be a major problem for the international participants, there were several times when it was noted that terms, words, acronyms, or jargon were unfamiliar to

the participants. A review of the materials could be done to ensure that terms are defined adequately. Notes could be provided to the instructors to be careful in their use of terms that might be unfamiliar to international participants.

Videotapes. International participants agreed that all the videotapes used in the course seemed to be fast-paced. Several comments on the videotapes related to the fact that the videotapes were distinctly "American" and that, to paraphrase the participants, "Americans talk fast."

Time estimates. The international participants seemed to require more time than estimated for some activities and, conversely, less time than estimated for others. The solution to the discrepancy seems to be to alert the instructors to very closely monitor the time needed depending on the participants' reactions.

Role plays. Participants in both evaluations felt the role plays gave them the opportunity to practice some of the skills they were learning in the course. However, some of the international participants felt it was more difficult to actually do the role plays because they were thinking not only about playing their specific role but also about the English they needed to use to get across the information. One suggestion was to allow them to conduct the role plays in their native languages. This would be possible only if enough participants shared the same native language to enable them to work in small group together.

Based on the evaluations described above, there were relatively few changes that needed to be made to the training evaluated to ensure its appropriateness for international audiences. While the videotapes were viewed as fast-paced, the international participants still found them valuable and were able to understand them well enough to meet the objectives of the instruction. After a review of the content, some changes were made related to terminology and acronyms used. A note was added to the instructors to closely monitor the time needed by participants for various readings and activities and adjust it, if necessary.

Recommendations

As businesses become global in scope, the training that is conducted within those companies must reflect the international nature of the trainee audiences. All the issues and points discussed below assume that English is used by the instructor and in the written materials. Several issues related to cross-cultural training, some of which were discussed above, are presented below along with recommendations to consider when developing, presenting and evaluating cross-cultural training.

If a training course is being newly developed for international participants or a course that already exists is being revised for an international audience, some needs analysis should be done prior to beginning course development to determine any unique needs of that audience. During development of the materials, if possible, a review of the content should be done by someone who is a non-native English speaker.

Course developers should consider incorporating into course materials more examples relevant to the international participants. Additionally, the instructor could be encouraged to use more cross-cultural examples in the classroom and ask participants to contribute examples relevant to business situations in their own countries. There might also be some notes provided to the instructors listing suggestions on things to consider when instructing courses with international participants.

Several problems may emerge when international participants are taught in English. Following are some recommendations that may help eliminate problems associated with language differences (Kycko, 1985):

> Explain or avoid references to persons, events and places that do not have an international reputation, even though they maybe well known in the United States.

Encourage instructors to slow their rate of speaking.

Encourage instructors to articulate more carefully than usual. It is not always obvious to international participants where one word ends and another begins.

Have instructors pause briefly between sentences. This gives people who are mentally translating a chance to catch-up.

Consider using more common words instead of less common ones. Use simple language (e.g., "do" rather than "accomplish", "use" rather than "utilize").

Avoid uncommon idioms. Phrases such as "If you get my drift" and "Get on the ball" should be avoided.

Have instructors speak loudly enough to be clearly heard.

Use consistent terminology. For example, instructors should not use goals, objective, and target to express the same concept.

Do <u>not</u> use contractions.

Consider using more action verbs. For example, "The office manager should interview all new hires"; not, "All new hires should be interviewed by the office manager."

Keep sentences and paragraphs relatively short and use simple construction.

Explain any terminology which may be unfamiliar to the participants but is essential to the content.

Provide a variety of instructional activities to present a given concept.

Consider including a glossary at the end of the course materials which can be a quick reference for participants.

Be aware that instructors with regional United States accents may pose additional problems for non-native English speakers.

Avoid the use of abbreviations and colloquialisms which prevent international participants from fully understanding all the course content.

Summarize key points at natural breaks in presentations and discussions. International audiences may have difficulty in understanding details and may need help following the instructor's general direction.

Encourage instructors to occasionally invite questions to clarify course content.

If videotapes are going to be used in courses that will be offered to international participants, they should be reviewed to ensure that they are likely to be appropriate for that audience. Course developers may want to consider using subtitles on the videotapes, or providing videoscripts for participants to refer to either before, during, or after viewing the videotape. In some cases, it might be feasible to dub over the English in some other language.

Another issue related to presenting courses to international participants is time. Because of language differences, international participants may need more time to prepare for and complete various activities within training courses. For example, international participants may need more time to complete readings than those whose native language is English.

When constructing evaluation instruments for courses, particular attention should also be paid to word usage and sentence structure so that language differences do not become a problem that will inadvertently effect how participants complete course rating forms. The evaluator of a course or training program that is being offered to an international audience should be aware of potential problems and concerns, such as those discussed above, when conducting the evaluation.

To the extent that the above issues are examined and recommendations are considered, courses developed and presented to audiences which include participants from outside the United States are likely to be more effective when they are first released and require fewer revisions.

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